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ABSTRACT

This play, which addresses cooperating teachers' feelings about grading student teachers, was inspired by a doctoral student who was gathering data for her dissertation. She interviewed eight cooperating teachers, eight university supervisors, and seven directors of field experiences in elementary education from a midwestern state. The interviews focused on: (1) skills they considered necessary for cooperating teachers and university supervisors in their roles as evaluators in early field experience, (2) training available to them, (3) an ideal training course/seminar/program, and (4) personnel and infrastructure of facilities and time required for program success. The resulting play begins with a veteran cooperating teacher discussing how uncomfortable she is with evaluating the work of her student teacher. A new cooperating teacher joins her and suggests alternative forms of evaluation. They discuss types of evaluation. They are joined by a teacher in the school who coordinates the field experiences at the school site and acts as the liaison between the school and university. She joins in the discussion, which is happening within earshot of the student teacher (who is teaching the class and getting uncomfortable). They discuss the fact that they need advice and support from the university or supervisors, and they note the type of support that they would find most useful. (SM)

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ED 417 160

COOPERATING TEACHERS: TO GRADE OR NOT TO GRADE?

A one-act play

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CAST

FES ..... A student involved in a field experience prior to student teaching or an internship

CT 1 ..... A veteran cooperating teacher mentoring the field experience student

CT 2 ..... A cooperating teacher mentoring for the first time

OSC ..... The teacher in the school who coordinates the field experiences at the school site and acts as the liaison between the school and the university

First performed on February 17, 1997, at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators at Washington, DC, with the following cast:

FES ..... Mary Sibley

CT 1..... Hema Ramanathan

CT 2..... Teresa Benedetti

OSC ..... Annette Thorson

The authors wish to note that most of the dialogues used in this play are the words of cooperating teachers, university supervisors and directors of field experiences who participated in a study conducted by one of us. We wish to thank them all and hope we have adequately represented their ideas and opinions.

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FOREWORD

The seed for this play was sown one day when a young doctoral student was gathering data for her dissertation. She interviewed eight cooperating teachers, eight university supervisors, and seven directors of field experiences in elementary education in a midwestern state who were randomly selected to participate in her study. The participants were from institutions that represented a wide spectrum as categorized by the Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education. All the participants were interviewed in three sessions for about 90 minutes each. The areas of concern included: (a) identification of skills they thought were necessary for cooperating teachers and university supervisors in their role of evaluator in early field experiences, (b) a description of the training available to them, (c) an ideal training course / seminar / program, and, (d) personnel and infrastructure of facilities and time required for a successful program.

An interview schedule was designed and refined based on a pilot study. The interviews were transcribed and the data analyzed qualitatively. Member checks were conducted; participants were provided opportunities to read and respond to transcripts of their interviews. A peer debriefer performed many functions in the course of this study: aligning the focus of the interview questions; checking the focus and quality of the data collection; and analyzing the data. Three other independent raters were involved in formulating the categories and in data triangulation. A description of the training processes in place for the cooperating teachers and the suggestions of the participants were recorded and analyzed. At the end of this process, all this information needed to be disseminated. The researcher had two considerations in mind: to present it in a natural style, and to reach an audience at a different level than the regular social science writing. She was introduced to the Reader's Theater format by a professor with a different approach to presenting data. Putting this together with the way the data had been collected - *talking* ... Presto!

I owe my participants, all 23 of them, a deep debt of gratitude for sharing their ideas and thoughts with me freely and without reservation. Teresa Benedetti was my alter ego in this process. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Donmoyer, The Ohio State University, for giving me the courage to experiment with this format.

I had fun writing this script. I hope you have fun 'reading' it.

Hema Ramanathan

Indianapolis, 1998

COOPERATING TEACHERS: TO GRADE OR NOT TO GRADE?

(FES is upstage miming teaching a lesson. The 'invisible students' are sitting with their backs to the audience at center stage. CT is at the front of the sage in the center sitting in a chair at an angle to the FES so that she is not blocking the FES and is still able to address the audience. There are papers on the chair next to her. She has a sheet of paper with her that she refers to when watching the FES.)

CT1: *(To the audience)* Look at her, so young and yet here with all the adult responsibilities of the classroom. She's a junior who's never been up in front of a class before, though she has observed other teachers. When I start to think that their field experience comes so late in their education *(shakes her head in disapproval)*. They've chosen a profession, and may even come to find that there is a problem with it. The field experience should be a time when I can help her make discoveries about the teaching process, and her role, my role, and then help her with her concerns. I guess I'm just uncomfortable at the very idea of having to not just enjoy the young person in my room. Why not? It would just be pleasant if I'm not asked to do anything like evaluate. By just enjoying my time with the student, we could get to the heart of issues, important to her, important to me, and of course her own development as a teacher. You know, because I feel they're just starting out. We don't usually see them until their junior year, and I would feel really bad about giving them a bad evaluation at that point in their education. But my responsibilities. (*smiling with a tinge of embarrassment*) I'm uncomfortable with this at times. It's difficult for me to tell someone what they're doing wrong. I remember in the past with student teachers, it's been really hard for me if I have something negative to tell them. Addressing problems in their practice was hard for me and I felt uncomfortable if I had something negative to say. Even in field experiences, if there is something negative to say to the student, I would

feel the same way, even though it wouldn't be their final field experience and there is still room for growth, time to make changes and improve. I don't think it would be real fair to have that much weight - a single grade for the whole experience. Particularly if it is their first experience in a classroom because I'm sure they are scared to death! I remember my own experiences. Feeling the weight of the CT's grade over me at all times. I mean, it's nice to know how you're doing in the interim of your semester but I just don't like it when my role is reduced to evaluation of the experience. I mean, we really don't get the chance to see improvement over time. When it is only one experience you have with the student, it isn't really fair to grade them. After all, what they do that first time in a field experience may not be a truthful indicator of what kind of teacher they're going to be. They're just getting their feet wet anyway. How can I, in fairness, grade a student on the first lesson she ever taught? I know other teachers feel the same way. They say, "I don't know how to give them a fair grade," but we teachers do it, and keep doing it. I feel very bad about having to give my student a grade that might affect them when it is too late in their educational career to do much about it. And I feel like, 'Oh this is going to be in their files forever.' It's hard enough to get a job without a poor evaluation I give them always with them. In an early field experience they still have time to make changes in their career, but then by the time they get to be juniors or seniors, if there is a problem, it's me the CT who has to drop the ax on them when it comes time to evaluate. I'm not sure that it's fair or a fair responsibility to put on me. I don't think it should come from me. I think they should have gotten an idea that there was a problem there before being placed with me. I don't think that responsibility should be put on my shoulders.

{Enter CT2 from the left of the stage unobtrusively. FES falters and looks at CT1 who nods encouragingly at her. FES continues her teaching with growing enthusiasm.}

CT2 Hema, can we continue our discussion of yesterday? *(Watching the FES)* She's not flawless, but she isn't totally bad either. Not like my student.

CT1 Yes, she's pretty good. Teresa, did you tell Annette to join us here?

CT2 I did. She'll be along in a few minutes.

CT1 I remember the first time I had a field experience student, I was pretty uncomfortable because -. Well, looking back on it now, I feel I graded her too high because I was a very young teacher. I felt being critical of somebody else, I just didn't want to shoot them down. I had a really hard time the first time, like you're having now.

CT2: Do you compare them to other students that you've had? What kind of, how do the comments come in, how does the evaluation go with you?

CT1: Yes, I do compare. But having had lots of students teachers and student assistants -. And, you know, just as long as they're - I just look for somebody who's energetic, who's willing to work with the kids, who's willing to try new ideas, and they may be a little bit different personality-wise. The student would have to do something pretty bad in order for me to sit there and say that this student should not be with children. I would have to really sense that. Not so much that this person needs to really shore up their lesson plans or this person does not have good classroom management, because those are all things that can be corrected. Those are all things that will improve with practice and with good guidance. So I have never come across anyone who right off the bat I would just, I don't know, I would have to really feel strongly about it. I don't know if I'm making much sense!

CT2 *(Nodding in agreement)* You know, there are a lot of different kinds of teachers out there that make good teachers. Hema, have you had a look at the evaluation form? I don't like grading people by giving them a number from one to ten, because there are so many gradations of that.

CT1: In my own experience I've found it very difficult. And in fact I think sometimes we're left with the impression that if the student gets a B, that's almost regarded as failure. And so, I mean I've become in past years, you know, really scared to give them any kind of a A- or B because apparently that's almost considered a failure in student teaching and therefore in these early field experiences also.

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CT2: I really don't like using the number system. Maybe something with a little bit more opportunity to respond to how the process is going, rather than just a number to sum it all up.

CT1: I'm sure the university has some criteria that they want them to meet. They may even have some sort of convoluted rubric that could be used to come up with a grade. But basically I evaluate students with a "You did a nice job today blah, blah, blah" because it isn't a cut and dried, black and white situation we're in. But they want it to be, by having us give a number or letter grade. I don't think we can really say an "A" in this and a "B" in that. .. but we give those kinds of evaluations on those forms. 'Circle number from one to ten.' What is an eight, or a seven if just the first and last numbers are described?

CT2: Yeah, I've seen how some have to mark a student along a continuum line with Excellent at one end and Not Meeting Standards at the other end rather than a specific grade. I wouldn't like to give a letter grade. I mean it is exceedingly difficult to do that.

CT1: Yeah, especially since each field experience student comes in with such different amounts of skill and different backgrounds. Yeah, I'd find that very difficult.

CT2: The way they want us to grade isn't very helpful to me. I mean a B, a D or whatever letter grade doesn't help you at all. Because it doesn't tell you what needs to be improved.

CT1: I feel better about filling out a form that doesn't expect me to give a single letter grade. With a form I could note changes, improvements over a period of time. I think that would be better, at least more fair, for both the student and me.

CT2: I think my technique in getting the most out of people is, is by using that evaluation in a verbal back and forth because I do it with the students. And, you know, I feel that through that I really bring out, you know, the best. And so the important thing to me is not so much that piece of paper but it's what happens while he and I, she and I are going over it which is really significant.

CT1: I prefer a narrative kind of evaluation where I have the opportunity to speak to the student's strengths and areas where I've seen them grow and it's different for every

student. And if you have to fill letter grade on it, it's almost impossible. You know, as I said before, some come in very confident and don't grow at all and then some come in with a lot of skills and work very hard and make a lot of growth. And that would be very difficult to pin a letter grade on to those situations.

CT2: Another thing I don't like is when someone is there so briefly and I have to assign a number to her. I mean, if the kid were there everyday, for three hours, then I would be more willing to document what I thought was someone who shouldn't be in education. I would probably have trouble confronting them about it.

CT1 Exactly. If the preservice teacher were to come back to me for three consecutive quarters or whatever, then I would really feel like I knew what I was doing.

[Enter OSC stage left, also unobtrusively. FES falters again and looks at CT1 who again nods encouragingly at her. FES continues her teaching with less enthusiasm and more nervousness.]

OSC: I am sorry we can't find another time and place for this meeting.

CT1: That's alright. But may be we should step out of the class just a bit so that we don't disturb my students.

[CT1, CT2 and OSC move across to the right of the stage. CT1 stands so that she is able to see the FES and her class.)

OSC: Teresa said that you both have questions and problems. With your field experience students?

CT1: No, no. She's fine, as you can see. No, it's with the evaluation we have to do. Do we have to give a grade? Can't we get another form or just give in a written narrative? Both of us would be so much more comfortable with that.

OSC: We've been discussing that and the university has offered alternative forms if you'd like to look at them. Some of them offer space for comments, apart from the checklist. But the grade seems here to stay.

CT2: Well, about this field experience. I mean, can the students actually fail?

OSC: Well, the field experience has a course attached to it. It is required for all teacher education majors and they have to get a C or better in the class before proceeding on to other courses like a methods course.

CT2: Do the university supervisors grade the field component? Do they evaluate the students in the field?

OSC: My understanding is that they don't. You, the teacher with whom the students are placed do the field evaluation of their performance. And then the instructor of the class grades the classroom, you know, the university classroom assignments and that kind of thing. I don't even know how much weight your evaluation carries in comparison to the supervisor's, and how that weighs into the overall grade. I guess you'll have to talk to the supervisors to find that out. I have no idea what percentage or anything about that and what meaning it would have on the final grade in the course.

CT2: It would be interesting to see how our grading compares to the supervisor's. I mean, I could be far too easy or too demanding. It would be really interesting to see how closely we see the student. Will we ever had the opportunity to do that?

CT1: Well, I don't see how I could find that out. I mean, the supervisor doesn't really seem to have the time to come in and sit and watch all of the lessons that need to be taught and you can't give someone a grade on one lesson if they only manage one visit per student per semester. Not a comfortable position to be in, or *(smiling ironically)* maybe too comfortable. For them!

OSC: It is the professor of the course who determines whether or not the field experience students have satisfactorily met their requirements in the school. And people do it different ways. One professors requires you teacher mentors to sign the lesson plan and give comments. And another person has a real short form that they use so that the teacher can give them feedback on the teaching. Another professor goes to all the classrooms of his students and looks at their bulletin boards to see for himself. And so it varies.

CT2: But I've never seen the instructor. *(To CT1)* Have you, Hema?

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CT1: No.

OSC: How the professor of the course incorporates that into the grade, or whether the professor does or not, I don't know. The college professor of the course assigns a certain amount of work that would have to be. At a certain point the student would have to turn it in to the college professor. Something that was done at the field site. Now, how that is graded, whether that is an extra assignment or whether that is part of, you know, the field experience itself, I'm not sure. But there is no credit given to a student unless that information comes in. So that is, that is definitely a part of their final grade. Now, how that is weighted, that I don't know. And it is probably weighted differently by each of the college professors.

CT2: *(Slightly exasperated)* So who actually assigns the grade for the students at the end of it all?

OSC: As a professor told me, "I, of course, always hold the aces. The bottom line is I assign the grade." *(CT1 grimaces and exchanges glances with CT2).* But this instructor also has a conference with each student before a grade is assigned. As she said, "I try to get them to the point where they see why they've received the grade they received."

CT2: What happens to our evaluations? Does anyone ever see them?

OSC: I don't know. I'll have to find out. I know that it is filed but I don't know if the supervisor or the instructor really look at them.

CT1: We cooperating teachers need advice, and help. We need support from university or the supervisors to do a fair job. If we could sit down, the professor, the student and me, if it were a three way conversation, and maybe through questioning by the professor, maybe that could help me bring out these points in a better way, a more discussion type of atmosphere, rather than just a grade. I think it is easier to soften your true views and evaluation when you are talking to someone because you soften your perception, you know. You say things like "Maybe you could have done this better" or "I really like how

you did this". But when you write down your evaluation, things really seem cut and dried, black and white.

CT2: *(With faint disgust)* I don't think my evaluation carries much weight within the university. So why are we asked to do this?

OSC: That is a question we can address soon, it seems. The university would like to hold some kind of workshop for the cooperating teachers. Can you think of any topics you would be interested?

CT1: *(Sarcastically)* If they haven't come into the building, I don't imagine they're going to be organizing any workshop.

OSC: I think they're willing to do it now, as a way of opening and establishing communication with us.

CT2: I would like to meet the supervisors and the instructor of the course to talk to us about the course and the evaluation so that I will know what I'm doing! If they brought all the cooperating teachers together for a specific course, and then the director of the experience talks to all of us as a group, I would find that very beneficial because I would know what the students were learning in the classroom. I would know exactly what the expectation is.

CT1: And not an inspirational speaker who would know nothing about the program! *(OSC and CT2 chuckle.)* What about evaluation forms? I think if we're introduced to a variety of methods we would be more comfortable with this responsibility. Specifically, I am interested in how would you approach a negative grade? And how would you define what you see as performance into a grade? Translation into either an A or a B or a score of some, some kind of rating scale.

CT2: *(Enthusiastically)* Yes. Probably what I would need may be words and techniques to better help the student, better encourage them without discouraging them. You know, it's very difficult to say, 'That lesson was really junky. This is what you should do to fix it up.' So consequently, you try and point out all the strong points and the weaker areas that are not

corrected the next time. So I would like some probably just some words and techniques to do that.

OSC: Great ideas! Let me talk to the university and see what can be arranged.

CT1 I need to get to my field experience student. She seems to have finished teaching. And she's doing a great job. No problems with her evaluation except that I want to write a long note about how good she is! So get me the alternative forms!!

OSC: Thanks for this ad hoc meeting. I'll get back to you soon with the details of the workshop. And I'll drop off the forms in your mailboxes.

(CT1 re-enters the classroom space on stage. CT2 ad OSC exit to the left of the stage talking in low tones.)

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